

MELISSA'S EXPERIENCE

By Alice E. Ives

Miss Melissa Crane had lived alone in the red brick house in Locust st. for over 15 years. Living alone sometimes makes one sweeter, mellow and more tolerant of his fellow creatures; but that is when he has hitched his "wagon to a star," or gone on the beautiful quest of finding his soul, and that which naturally follows—the soul of all mankind. Miss Melissa had not given much time to either of these pursuits. If she had, this would be another story. She had been a decent, God-fearing woman, living strictly within the letter of the law. If she had ever had a love affair it was entirely unknown to any one in Barrington. Still, a good deal might have happened before then, as Melissa Crane was all of 30 when she came there. Certain it was that something in her life very like a tragedy had been caused by the drink habit, and had made Miss Crane strong in her denunciation of intemperance. She was a prominent officer in the W. C. T. U. and something of a factor in influencing the election which resulted in the town going "dry."

Old Hannah, who had gone faithfully for years, once a year to "clean up" for Miss Crane, probably knew more about that lady's affairs than any one else in Barrington. Oddly enough, Miss Crane was even at times confidential with her servitor, perhaps because she found she was like herself, close-mouthed.

When old Hannah was set to open up and clean a long disused bedroom her curiosity got the better of her.

"Going to have company?" she ventured.

"No," answered Miss Crane. "It's a child." At the woman's astonished look she added: "I guess she must be more than 12. I didn't think to ask. Oh, dear! I don't know how I'm

ever going to stand it, but I'll get her off to some good boarding school just as quick as I can."

"Have you adopted her?" still further ventured Hannah.

"Adopted her?" snorted Miss Crane, as though asked if she had committed burglary. "Not at all. She is the child of a good-for-nothing half-brother of mine. Her mother died about three years ago, and now he has been killed in an accident. Some one wrote to me about it. He hadn't left a penny, and they wanted to know what they could do with Ethel. Well, there didn't seem to be but one thing to do, and that was to send for her. I don't know any more about taking care of a child than—than nothing," sighed Miss Crane.

"Well, there," reassured Hannah, "I do; and if you want any help—if she gets croup or something you just send for me quick."

It was rather a pathetic little figure in black that landed at the door of the red brick house. When the appeal in the large brown eyes greeted Miss Crane she did something quite unexpected to herself; she put her arms around the child and kissed her. Miss Crane concluded she was not pretty, but she had "the making" of good looks.

Ethel was not quite the untamed barbarian Miss Crane had expected, though she had her quota of faults, and committed some of the usual childish misdemeanors. But she succeeded in penetrating the rather hard crust of Melissa's heart to the extent of not being packed off to a boarding school, and was suffered to continue her education on the home ground.

It was a sore trial to the elder woman when the girl she had learned to love as her own seemed to care for the company of Irvin Banks. Ethel was now 19. She had been graduated from the high school and had been studying at an art academy, and was once more back in Barrington. She was bright, capable, and with a